

COST SHARING PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANIZATIONS TO INCREASE SMALL-SCALE COMMUNITY AMENITIES, RECREATION AND LEISURE SPOTS IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA

RECOMMENDATION

That the July 11, 2023, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01577, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	LIVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A Rebuildable City	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	15-Minute Districts
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown Public Places Plan • The Chinatown Strategy: Energizing a Prosperous Future • Downtown Core and Transit Safety Plan 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UPE00565 Downtown Vibrancy Strategy, Urban Planning Committee, June 15, 2021 • UPE00948 Opportunities for Small-Scale Community Amenities, Recreation and Leisure Spots Downtown, Community and Public Services Committee, October 11, 2022 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the October 31/November 2, 2022, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report pursuing options for cost sharing partnerships with organizations to increase small-scale community amenities, recreation and leisure spots in

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the Downtown area, including options for joint implementation of a pilot program for small court-style activities, corporate sponsorships, and similar initiatives outlined in Attachment 1 of the October 11, 2022, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00948.

Executive Summary

- Administration suggests that any proposed downtown amenities be directed to either the Downtown Vibrancy Fund and/or the Community-Led Construction Project process, to apply for funding and/or implementation support.
- Edmonton's downtown community amenities are important to attract and engage visitors and Edmontonians and to bolster the local economy.
- Discussions were held with the Downtown Edmonton Community League, the Chinatown and Area Business Association, the Downtown Business Association of Edmonton and other stakeholders to determine possible amenities ideas and locations. Social disorder remains a concern amongst stakeholders, including associated costs and required security.
- Additional funding mechanisms are presented in case the status quo is not sufficient:
 - That new, dedicated funding be added to the Downtown Vibrancy Fund.
 - That funds be designated from the Downtown Vibrancy Fund solely for amenity use.
 - That a new standalone funding mechanism and process be created.

REPORT

Small community amenity spaces are important strategic investments in Edmonton's downtown. These spaces provide an opportunity for activities, ranging from social recreation to more structured physical activities including sports and organized recreation. Amenities can make the downtown more attractive and engaging and can promote a healthy and active lifestyle, while fostering a sense of community. Having a range of downtown amenities (which reflect the interests and needs of diverse users) can boost the local economy by attracting tourists and visitors, who might spend money on dining, shopping and other activities in the area, or by keeping residents and workers in the downtown area for longer periods of time.

There are existing publicly accessible amenities in the downtown core including skating, wading, swimming pool, parks, gyms and activation projects in areas such as Churchill Square and 104 Street. The City has several downtown amenity projects underway including Warehouse Park, Centennial Plaza and the MacDonald Drive Temporary Activation. These amenities include active fitness areas, play structures and basketball hoops.

There are additional opportunities to create recreation and leisure spaces within the downtown area. These opportunities could be small-scale, such as a business putting a game table or a bench on an unused portion of their property, or large-scale, such as park-like installations with multiple activities. Vacant lots, whether privately or publicly owned, could offer short-term activations such as basketball courts or green open spaces while they remain undeveloped.

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Further, many of the road right-of-ways in the downtown area are wide enough that the City could contemplate additional landscaping or activations along them.

The City Plan emphasizes the importance of creating complete and compact communities that are walkable, bikeable and transit-friendly. It also aims to promote economic growth and diversification, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. A more vibrant downtown, with a range of both active and passive amenities that people can walk or bike to, supports the implementation of The City Plan

Opportunities

Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00948 suggested that several court-style sites be identified in undeveloped locations as a pilot program. This need was confirmed by both the Downtown Edmonton Community League and the Downtown Business Association of Edmonton who advised that a basketball court and tennis/pickleball courts would be welcomed additions to the downtown area.

Administration looked for a site that would be large enough to accommodate these amenities without the need to purchase land. One site appeared to be favourable and discussions commenced; however, this location became unavailable. If directed by Council, Administration can continue to identify potential locations. If the desire was to have larger amenity sites in the downtown core, land would likely have to be purchased.

Administration identified one City-owned lot that could house fitness equipment and a 3-on-3 basketball area, and another potential City owned site in Chinatown. All other identified sites would need asphalt or the installation of a hard surface to be suitable. Warehouse Park, when built, will include recreational areas for basketball and other active facilities, which should fulfill some of the needs that were expressed. If there is a need for a site large enough to accommodate tennis/pickleball and basketball courts, then land would have to be purchased.

Potential Amenity Sites on City-Owned Land:

- Veterans Park (10013-10103 Bellamy Hill Rd NW) is in the strategic design phase of redevelopment through the Community-Led Construction Project process.
- City-owned vacant lots in the Quarters could potentially be turned into community and/or contemplative gardens or a mini-activity area (e.g. hoops, fitness equipment, games tables, skateboard).
- As discussed in the previous section of the report, sites in the city centre were explored as possibilities for hard-surface, court-style amenity or fitness areas. Only one City-owned site was large enough for tennis and/or pickleball, but this site had to be removed because it became unavailable. The one other site explored is an appropriate size to accommodate a 3-on-3 basketball court.

The Community-Led Construction Project team does not have the capacity to undertake additional projects this year. If more community organizations propose amenity development on City-owned land, more resources will be required. It is not anticipated that there will be an influx of interest by community groups in developing City-owned sites in the downtown area using the

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Community-Led Construction Project process, but requests for additional resources (up to 3 full-time equivalents or FTE) will be forthcoming, contingent on the amount and complexity of projects. Veterans Park is in early design stages and it is possible that one community garden will be developed. However, until social disorder and security concerns are alleviated, there will likely be little movement.

Potential Amenity Sites on Privately Owned Land:

- Upgrades to a courtyard for a non-profit entity that could provide public access during the day.
- Enhancements to a privately owned park space that is publicly accessible.
- A sidewalk or alley activation/public art project.

Most of these privately owned opportunities would be eligible to apply for funding through the Downtown Vibrancy Fund, which already has a process to manage capacity and will not have implications for the Community-Led Construction Project team.

Attachment 1 outlines all of these opportunities in greater detail. To move forward on any of the identified projects, a detailed plan and budget would be required for each project. Some stakeholders stated that they would require initial capital but that they would be able to contribute towards operating and/or programming the spaces.

Current Cost Sharing Mechanisms (Status Quo)

Administration's position is that existing programs are best suited to attend to the proposals for downtown amenities. These programs include:

- **The Downtown Vibrancy Fund**¹ supports businesses and organizations with projects that align with actions from the Downtown Vibrancy. This fund can be used for a variety of projects that could include small-scale infrastructure. Typically, projects that are eligible include activating publicly accessible spaces to more people and in new ways, optimizing the four-season experience, making downtown more fun, light-touch improvements to public spaces and enhanced safety. To enable this funding mechanism, a business or organization submits a proposal by submitting a Downtown Vibrancy Fund intake form to the City for funding consideration. There is no dedicated funding specifically set aside for small-scale community amenities under the current Downtown Vibrancy Fund.
- **Community Led Construction Projects**² assists community organizations that want to create (or make improvements to) amenities on publicly owned land. The City provides support as the project proceeds through the City's design, permitting, construction and approval processes. The community is responsible for raising 100 per cent of project funding, however, this program provides assistance to raise funds, which may include grants from the City of Edmonton.

¹ City of Edmonton (n.d.) Downtown Vibrancy Fund Program Guide.
edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/Downtown_VibrancyStrategy_FundingProgramGuide.pdf?cb=1654353699

²
edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/documents/PDF/CommunityLedConstructionProjectManual.pdf

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- **Corporate Grants and Sponsorship Opportunities** are available that may support small-scale amenities in the downtown area depending on the project or organization's eligibility. Attachment 2 includes a list of corporate grant programs provided by other organizations that could help partners fund amenities, if they are eligible under the grant requirements.

A specific project may use one or more of the above programs as they are not mutually exclusive. For example, a project could receive funding from the Downtown Vibrancy Fund, as well as a corporate partner and be advanced by a community group through the Community Led Construction Project if located on City owned land.

Currently, the Downtown Vibrancy Fund is promoted through web page updates, social media posts and key messages at appropriate events. Should additional funding become available, these tactics could be increased. These programs are designed to be nimble and can react quickly when opportunities arise.

Additional Cost Sharing Mechanisms

The following options are not recommended and would require Council direction for Administration to undertake any or all of them:

- 1. A dedicated allotment of funds added to the Downtown Vibrancy Fund (Net New)** - Additional funds could be provided to the Downtown Vibrancy Fund which would be earmarked to fund downtown amenity spaces and support programming and/or operating partnerships. This option requires that an unfunded service package of \$300,000³ be brought forward as part of the Fall Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment.
- 2. Dedicated funding through Downtown Vibrancy Funding (Use Existing Funds)** - A portion of the existing Downtown Vibrancy Fund could be dedicated to providing more amenities. This option would not require new or additional funding and instead the fund would allocate funds exclusively for the use of downtown amenity spaces and to support programming and/or operating partnerships. In this case, funds from the existing Downtown Vibrancy Fund would be competing with other uses and projects and would potentially limit the impact of the Downtown Vibrancy Fund, which supports activation programming and development downtown.
- 3. Standalone Funding (Net New)** - A new funding mechanism and program could be created as a pilot project that encourages community groups, in partnership with the City, to deliver projects in the downtown core. Administration has not scoped this option fully, but a new administrative process and program would be required, impacting operations, resources and timelines. The scope would need to ensure that those stakeholders already engaged are accommodated while being open to other partnerships. This would require an unfunded service package of \$300,000 to be brought forward as part of the Fall Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment. The amount of \$300,000 is based on discussions and estimates with stakeholders for potential amenities, see Attachment 1.

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In addition to these amounts of funding, an entirely new application and intake process would need to be developed, which would require additional resources. At this time there is not an opportunity to reallocate resources for this work and new funding would be required.

Budget/Financial Implications

This report suggests that the current state continues as there are already funding and process mechanisms in place, should organizations or partners choose to create new amenities. Additionally, there are a number of current and planned amenity improvements (Attachment 3).

Additional budget considerations may need to be updated in the future to align with an increasing demand on internal resources.

The Downtown Vibrancy Fund provides funding to businesses or organizations who can create or improve amenities downtown through potential financial assistance and/or procurements for the initial capital requirements. Any new amenity on City-owned land may result in the need for increased operational budgets for upkeep and maintenance, so the preference is that a maintenance agreement is created with the partner.

If Council requests to increase the Downtown Vibrancy Fund, an unfunded service package of \$300,000 would be brought forward for consideration as part of the Fall Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment. This amount would be supplemented by partners who are able to access their own funding resources or seek corporate sponsorship (Attachment 2).

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Stakeholder engagement was conducted with representatives of the Downtown Edmonton Community League, the Downtown Business Association of Edmonton, the Chinatown and Area Business Association, the Chinatown Transformation Collaborative and the Chinese Benevolent Association. These same stakeholders were engaged in the previous report (October 11, 2022, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00948), many of whom have conducted their own engagement and needs assessments.

All of the stakeholders consulted had concerns about the amount of social disorder in the downtown area and expressed reluctance to install street furniture or equipment that can be easily damaged or misused, as this would make ongoing maintenance and security an issue. These concerns are an impediment to creating more vibrant social spaces, since the experience of these organizations is that anything that can be broken or stolen will be. For one stakeholder, this was such a concern in the Chinatown area that they chose not to participate in engagement for this project.

Other stakeholders had an appetite for outdoor fitness activities and also more passive forms of leisure, such as community or contemplative gardens. When more in-depth engagement is conducted to come to final designs of any of these future amenities, then thought must be put into how to secure the sites or how to source furniture or equipment that would be difficult to damage. Further discussions with a broader audience of Edmontonians living downtown would

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be needed to refine any of the proposed amenities into a concrete design and plan. These should include an equity (GBA+) analysis and an accessibility review.

GBA+

Administration will ensure that any funded programs include provisions where applicants are required to include GBA+ or equity-creating processes in their planning, engagement, design and implementation, so that any new amenities make downtown more accessible and enjoyable for all.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE REVIEW SECTION

This report was reviewed for environment and climate risks. Based on the review completed, no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Potential Amenity Sites
2. Corporate Sponsorship Scan
3. Current and Planned Downtown Amenities